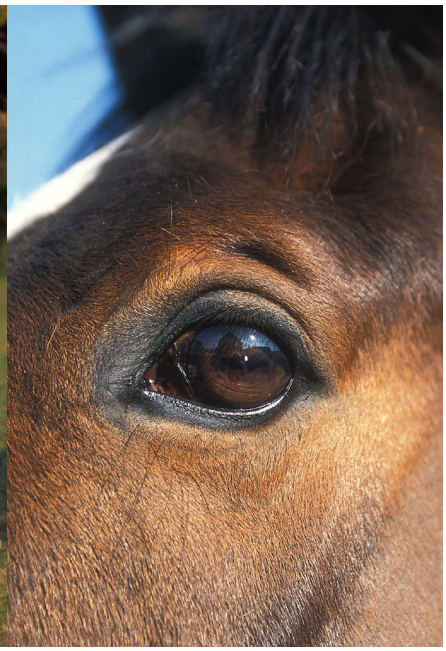
If you suspect that your horse or pony has one or more of the symptoms of PPID, contact your vet for a diagnosis.



feeding those with PPID

Pituitary Pars Intermedia Dysfunction also known as Cushing's Disease





In the healthy horse, hormones exist in a fine balance and play an important role in maintaining and controlling bodily functions. PPID is a common neurodegenerative endocrine (hormonal) disease, associated predominantly with the ageing horse, resulting in an imbalance of these hormones.

The hypothalamus and pituitary gland, sitting at the base of the brain, are the command centre for the production of hormones and in PPID horses, neurons (nerves) in the hypothalamus undergo progressive degeneration and produce insufficient quantities of a nerve transmitter called dopamine. Dopamine is important in controlling the secretions of a part of the pituitary gland called the pars intermedia, which in turn is responsible for controlling the secretion of hormones, such as ACTH (adrenocorticotrophin hormone), which results in the symptoms of PPID.

Symptoms of PPID

Horse and ponies suffering from PPID may display one or more of a number of symptoms.

- The best known, and probably the easiest to spot, is a long or curly coat that fails to shed fully.
- A pot-bellied appearance, usually as a result of muscle loss over the topline and abnormal fat distribution (above eyes, crest and above tail head).
- Excessive sweating.
- Increased water intake so often thirsty and, as a result, urinate more frequently.
- Weight loss
- Lethargy
- Prone to laminitis or become at risk before the above symptoms present themselves.

If your horse or pony shows any of these signs, contact your vet. They can use blood tests to measure ACTH and help diagnose PPID. Most vets prescribe a medicine called Pergolide (Prascend), which stimulates dopamine receptors in the brain and thereby replaces the activity of the damaged nerve supply to the pituitary gland. This results in reduction of ACTH hormone production to normal levels. Your vet will adjust the dose based on your horse's symptoms and blood test results. PPID gets worse over time, but many horses and ponies can lead normal lives with medication.

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Diet Management

Laminitis risk is a key consideration when managing diets for horses and ponies with PPID, particularly those that also have insulin dysregulation (ID), which your vet may also test for. Although not all horses with PPID have ID, managing their diets as you would for a horse prone to laminitis is considered the safest approach. This means minimising the amount of non-structural carbohydrates (NSC: starch and sugar) fed.

Pergolide, especially at higher doses, can affect appetite, with horses going off their food and eating something for a while before going off it. Rather than constantly changing the overall diet, it is worth adding extras to tempt them, like cinnamon, fenugreek, mint, apple juice or blended or grated apples, carrots or bananas. It may also be wise to give medication separately from their main concentrate feed.

Promoting Weight Gain/Maintaining Condition

Forage

- If possible, choose hay or haylage with a water-soluble carbohydrate (WSC: sugars and fructan) content below 10-12% to help control sugar intake. Only laboratory testing can confirm the WSC content.
- Soaking hay for up to 12 hours can reduce its WSC content. Increase the soaking time gradually, as soaked hay may be less appealing to your horse, and take care in warm weather, to avoid fermentation or bacterial growth.
- Providing these precautions have been taken, forage may be fed ad lib to provide fibre calories and support gut health.
- As soaking hay reduces the nutrient content of forage, Alfalfa Plus Oil and/or Fibre-Beet, can be fed as additional sources of highly digestible fibre as well as some quality protein and other nutrients.
- Manage time at grass carefully to limit sugar and fructan intake. Turning out very late at night, when grass fructan and sugar levels are lowest, and ensuring the horse is brought in by mid-morning, is safest. Avoid turning out onto pastures during cold, bright conditions, (e.g. frosty mornings), when the fructan and sugar levels increase.

Concentrates

- Many traditional conditioning feeds are higher in starch and should be avoided, especially if your horse has also been diagnosed with insulin dysregulation. Senior Soft & Condition is a delicious high fibre, high-calorie feed that helps promote and maintain condition, keep starch intake to a minimum and can be fed dry or as a mash.
- Ease & Excel is also low in starch and high in calories, while Keep Calm Mash may also be useful.
- Where additional calories are required, Outshine high oil supplement may be added to an existing balanced diet.
- Alternatively, Lo-Cal or Performance Balancer may be fed to provide quality protein, vitamins and minerals, without the starch or calories of a mix or cube. Additional calories can then be supplied through Outshine, Fibre-Beet or Alfalfa Plus Oil.

Encouraging Weight Loss/Waistline Control

Forage

- As for those requiring weight gain (see notes above), forage should contain less than 10-12% water soluble carbohydrates (WSC) and may need soaking to reduce this.
- Forage intake should be restricted to the equivalent of 1.5% of the horse's bodyweight per day, on a dry matter basis. Allow 1.8% of bodyweight, of fresh hay daily to account for its moisture content (around 15%) and to meet minimum fibre requirements. If soaking, weigh out 2.1% of bodyweight, as dry matter can be lost during soaking.
- Use small-holed nets or other methods to make forage rations last longer and to keep the horse chewing.
- In addition to the above guidelines regarding turnout, you may need to limit how much grass your horse can eat. Options include strip grazing, a grazing muzzle, or turnout in a grass-free area (a dry lot). If there is no grass, provide suitable forage, such as soaked hay.
- Natural Meadow Cobs, Light Chaff or Speedi-Beet may be fed as low calorie alternative or additional fibre sources, as long as overall fibre/calorie intake is controlled.

Concentrates

- For weight loss and the really good-doer, Lo-Cal or Performance Balancer can be given to supply those nutrients likely to be lacking in forage but without unwanted calories.
- Light Chaff or Natural Meadow Cobs can be fed with the balancer, to encourage chewing, as can small amounts of Speedi-Beet. (1 Baileys mug of dry Speedi-Beet soaked with 5 mugs of water makes half a bucket of beet with fewer calories than a Stubbs scoop of Light Chaff).
- Senior Soft & Lite is a reduced calorie option which is fully balanced and can be fed as the sole concentrate and soaks to a tasty mash which has proven particularly palatable for the fussy ones.

As each horse is an individual, if you have any queries about feeding your PPID equine, do contact a Baileys Nutritionist on 01371 850247, nutrition@baileyshorsefeeds.co.uk or visit www.baileyshorsefeeds.co.uk.

